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The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development

Letter dated 11 December 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the address by Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the statement on Nagorno-Karabakh by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Chairman-in-Office made at the 14th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, held in Brussels on 5 December 2006 (see annexes I and II).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annexes were distributed as a document of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, under items 17 and 27, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Agshin **Mehdiyev**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex I to the letter dated 11 December 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Address by Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan
14th meeting of the Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
Brussels, 5 December 2006

First, I would like to join other speakers in extending appreciation to Minister Karel de Gucht for the work done by the Belgian OSCE Chairmanship throughout this year. I am also pleased to welcome my Spanish colleague, Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, as the incoming Chairman-in-Office and wish him every success in fulfilling this important and responsible task.

We believe that the key purpose of reforms within our Organization is to strengthen its effectiveness in solving the most urgent problems of the participating States. Failure to implement its own decisions seriously undermines credibility of the OSCE in the eyes of its members and affects negatively its stance in the global arena.

Regrettably, this year too was marked by a number of appalling incidents related to discrimination, racism, xenophobia, hate speech and other manifestations of intolerance, particularly against Muslims, in some of the participating States. Such negative phenomena in the OSCE area violate human rights and fuel tensions globally. As the Chairman of the Ministerial Council of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Azerbaijan calls on the OSCE participating States to undertake concrete measures to combat this phenomena through the promotion of tolerance and overcoming of ignorance about Islam.

In this regard we support educational institutions for learning and teaching of Islam, its principles and philosophy, as one of the efficient instruments in fighting Islamophobia, particularly in Europe, and promoting mutual understanding and respect between various confessions.

To provide our own input to this important process, in 2007 we plan to host in Baku under the OIC aegis an international conference on the role of mass media in developing tolerance and mutual understanding. We invite the relevant OSCE structures as well as OSCE participating States to actively contribute to this event.

The outcomes of the meetings on economic and environmental dimension, held in Dushanbe, Vienna, Baku and Prague, demonstrated strong interest of participating States to transport-related issues. Azerbaijan is contributing to the development of transport networks throughout the OSCE area, actively participating in the activities of OSCE, GUAM and other bodies, and currently implementing joint large-scale projects with our neighbours and partners – Georgia and Turkey. At the same time,

topics of the next Economic and Environmental Forum, namely land degradation, soil contamination and water management, are of direct interest for Azerbaijan. We face many problems in this field, especially in the conflict zone.

We view the UN General Assembly resolution-sponsored OSCE-led Environmental Assessment Mission to the fire-affected territories of Azerbaijan as a good example of rapid and effective practical reaction to an urgent and complex problem faced by a participating State. We request the Chairman-in-Office to submit the Mission's Report to the UN General Assembly and its Member-States, and call on the organizations and programmes of the United Nations system to launch a joint process of preparation for a long-term Environmental Operation in the fire-affected lands as it is envisaged by the UNGA resolution.

To my deep regret, I still cannot extend the same level of enthusiasm to the whole process of settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite increased activity demonstrated throughout this year by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmen, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and the parties involved we have not yet achieved the irreversible solution.

There is no alternative to finding solution in the framework of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. At the appropriate stage of the settlement process it will be possible to discuss this issue by the whole population of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Proceeding from the standards of democracy, rule of law and human rights, we believe that process of definition of a status shall take place on an equal basis, with direct and full participation of entire population of the region, which are both Armenian and Azerbaijani communities.

Therefore, Azerbaijani population should return in safety and dignity to their places of origin in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. This will be followed by opening of the communications for the mutual use by both sides in two directions, restoration of inter-communal relations and normal life in the region, cooperation between two communities in the humanitarian sphere, implementation of the special programs on education and tolerance, establishment more trust between people and nations.

To reach that point it is necessary to ensure complete withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The territories cannot be held as hostages, this will be counterproductive to the settlement process and further aggravate the situation. There is a better way to guarantee security of population and irreversibility of settlement than delaying the withdrawals, which is letting population of both communities inside the region to engage in constructive cooperation, guaranteed by a special Interim Arrangement and supported by the Governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Unfortunately, the sincerity of Armenian negotiators is questioned by such clear provocations as a declared intention of Armenian separatists to hold a so-called "*constitutional referendum*" in the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh. This is yet another

unconstructive step taken by Armenian side in its attempt to consolidate and camouflage the results of its illegal activities. Azerbaijan shall never accept such illegal acts of the Armenian side, which are based on notorious practice of fait accompli and fully contradict the ongoing efforts to bring durable peace and stability to the region.

In conclusion, please allow me to say that we particularly appreciate active personal involvement of distinguished Minister De Gucht in the conflict settlement processes in the South Caucasus and shall be ready to welcome the same level of engagement of distinguished Mr. Moratinos as the next Chairman-in-Office.

And finally, I would like to reiterate our support to Kazakhstan's bid to assume the OSCE Chairmanship in 2009 and hope for a positive decision on this issue. Such step, in our belief, will strengthen the sense of responsibility and ownership of our Organization among the states east of Vienna, and will serve as recognition of their contribution to its activities.

Annex II to the letter dated 11 December 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
Ministerial Council
Brussels 2006

Statement on Nagorno-Karabakh

We are encouraged that negotiations in 2006, facilitated by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group and supported by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, have brought the sides closer to agreement on the basic principles for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

We welcome the support of the leaders of the G8 to these efforts, expressed at the G8 Summit in St. Petersburg in July.

We urge the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to redouble their efforts in the coming year to finalize these basic principles as soon as possible.

We call on the sides, with the assistance of the international community, to extend cooperation to conduct an environmental operation to suppress the fires in the affected territories and to overcome their detrimental consequences. These measures can constitute significant steps towards restoring confidence between the sides. The OSCE is available to assist.

We also express our continuing support for the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and his mission to the region, and particularly for their efficient assistance to the Environmental Assessment Mission and for their ongoing monitoring of the ceasefire. We regret that incidents along the front lines continue occasionally to result in loss of life and call on both sides to adhere strictly to the ceasefire.